



**Queensland University of Technology**  
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**Building the computer mediated distance learning community: Issues and observations drawn from teaching and learning** *Michael Dee*

This paper stems from personal experience as the Programme Leader of a Master's ( MA ) degree in Health and Community Development at De Montfort University, Leicester, England.

The programme started in 1998 and uses the ' First Class ' conferencing system to conduct seminars for each module to be studied via the internet. Students are required to take part in the seminars and need ready access to a computer with full internet connection. There are just 14 days of face to face contact between students-tutors-colleague students in the 2 years of the programme.

A significant amount of evaluation material has built up and for the purposes of this paper this material and a small questionnaire will form the basis of observations as to the student experience of this form of distance learning.

While the paper presentation will encourage an element of ' show-tell ' around this and other styles of distance learning and possibly a brief demonstration if technology permits, this paper also wishes to pose a number of critically based questions about the nature of the learning community that distance learning seeks to create and support.

There are important questions for providers of all forms of distance education particularly those that rely on the internet, around resourcing, technical support, distance study support and equity concerns in an increasingly competitive environment penetrated by market values.

Teaching and learning this way arguably creates different and potentially challenging and empowering sets of social relations between students and tutors and alongside the development of so called ' Smart Communities ' in America which have information technology infrastructure planned into the built urban environment, the potential for social inclusion is considerable, as it is for social exclusion.

This paper will explore these and other issues around computer mediated distance learning.